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JENNY LIND'S SINGING METHOD

MANY have been the opinions, guesses and controversies over the singing method of the world famous Jenny Lind.

Some have thought that she got most of her training in Sweden, others that Garcia did everything for her. Four years ago a letter from Jenny Lind to one of her musical friends in Stockholm was discovered and for the first time published in Swedish. This letter is believed to be the only authentic statement of Jenny Lind as regards the development of her own voice as well as her ideas of training in general. Much of it will be found of value to singing teachers of to-day. The letter is dated June 2nd, 1868, when she was forty-eight years old and had become a national favorite in England.—*Transl.*

Oak Lea, Victoria Road. London.

June 2nd. 1868.

Dear Professor Bystrom.

Better late than never, says our old Swedish proverb. I hope it may serve me this time, for your letter should have been answered long ago. I was too busy when it arrived and perhaps I also was a little alarmed at the thought of putting my ideas before your committee as you wished to do.

It has always been difficult for me to present *in words* what has been so individual with me, for I have always been guided by a God-given instinct for what is right in Art and on that I have always acted. Such persons are seldom able to explain or offer arguments over what to them is so simple and natural.

Still, my experience is so rich, my mentality so much clearer than ever before, that I will gladly tell what I know on the understanding that this *letter remains with you* and only extracts be used for others. That is, use what you consider practical and useful in the training of your pupils. Such use would naturally give me the greatest pleasure.

Now I am going, as far as I am able, to answer each point separately. Our dear, dear Fatherland is specially rich in raw material, in that you are perfectly right—our Scandinavian voices have a charm which no other voices in the whole world have. The poetry of our country, the wonderful light summer nights with the midnight sun, Spring awakening as if by magic, our mountains, our lakes, the excellent and deep sensibility given our people—all this is to be found in our Scandinavian voices. They carry, so to speak, the scent of the pines. . . . So our Lord has done his part towards us Swedes—as He has for all others—but our excitability and slowness, these two unhappy contrasts, prevent the development of our unusual natural gifts. The vocal instruction is everywhere miserable. I have taught myself to sing, Garcia could only teach me a few things. He did not understand my individuality. But that really did not matter. What I most wanted to know was two or three

things and with those he did help me. The rest I knew myself and the birds and our Lord as the maestro did the rest.

I fancy the old Italian method is the only right and most natural one. The Italian people is born with singing throats, but the real Art is not to be found there now.

I have heard nothing of the *Real*.—Mad. Persiani and Lablache they were from the real time and this Rossini also thought. Singing nowadays is terrible shrieking without soul and with a pretentious manner. That is what one often hears.

Do you know Garcia's singing method? It is very good. He has advanced much these last twenty years and has been somewhat cured of his dangerous fault of letting his pupils sing on *too long a breath* until he ruined their voices. Still, his school is the only one I can recommend and contains most things I can subscribe to.

The forming of the tone is the first thing naturally. It must be formed on all vowels so that the rich and different tonal color in the words may receive the right shading. In the same way as the vowels, the consonants must be produced. All this with a quiet mouth;—lips still, and only a small opening between the teeth. The lower jaw must drop, of course.

It is really to *speak* singing. Only so do the words come out right and when the words are properly pronounced the whole singing is wonderfully facilitated.

The registers are different with nearly every individual so they must be taught individually, i. e., first the chest tones with the naturally closed larynx; then comes the binding together of chest and middle voice when the larynx is opened, till in the middle of the third register, when it is completely so. Before the beginning of the highest register, the larynx closes itself again in soprano—just as it does in chest notes. The great difference is this that in the higher tones the uvula is entirely drawn up against the soft palate so that the upper part of the head forms the higher notes. It is presumably on this account that the name, head voice, originated.

Timbre and tone color are words which always seem to me unnecessary and lacking in clearness. I do not understand them, for through the careful and detailed placing of all vowels as well as the conscientious study of the consonants in harmony with the vowels, must all possible tone-color be produced, and I need only choose according to need.

Timbre again, belongs according to my idea to the *expression of the soul*. My timbre must obey my feelings. Therefore a correct declamation and careful phrasing in all its fine and endless shadings together with a right development of the *inner being* must absolutely help me over the technique to the real subject (emotion) which the vowels stand for. If I sing of joy, sorrow, hope, love, my Saviour, folk-songs, moonlight, sunshine, etc., I feel naturally quite differently, and my voice takes on my soul's timbre without that I need in the least care with what tone color I sing.

Every thing was prepared when I deeply and quietly studied the meaning of the words and when I drew a thread, so to speak, through the whole poem. The beginning and end belonged thus together and the shadings were links on a chain which I will liken to a snake biting its own tail.

To be able to sing, the whole personality must be developed. So is it with everything in life if we would reach any sort of *beginning of perfection*. We must look widely around us; no one-sided development. Any one who wishes to master vocal art, must study many other things. Singing is a peculiar

gift more difficult to develop than is believed. The vocal teacher's profession is difficult and important. *Difficult*,—because each voice must be treated individually and the whole character be "spread out" or "drawn out." No stupid person can learn to sing with expression.

His profession is *important* because a wrong method ruins the health. For the whole body sings, even the legs. . . . I myself could barely drag myself to my carriage after my Operas.

So does the soul react on the body. . . .

I write such rhapsodies that perhaps you do not understand half of what I want to say, but I am sure that your deeply musical sense and great intelligence will be able to put this together. I speak of my own experience naturally. The power of dramatic declamation was with me such a free gift given with such liberality, that the spiritual only needed the opportunity, life (*Leben*) to come into expression.

As concerns my voice, the difficulties with my throat were so great, the hindrances were so tremendous, necessitating such constant energy and patience (two virtues which for me were, alas, almost impossible) that only my burning love for Art in its spiritual sense could enable me to go through the dreadful slavery. My breathing was naturally very short, not a sign of *coloratur* and an impossible attack. I never heard such an attack in anybody else. For twenty-five years have I steadily worked on the chromatic scale and only five or six years ago did it come perfectly—when I no longer needed it. . . . But study is always wholesome.

The breathing is the foundation of all singing. On that almost entirely depends the character and firmness of the tone. The art to breathe well consists in a saving of the outgoing breath. The breath must be taken quickly and steadily kept in the lungs, only very slowly letting it go with the song.

This can be practised without singing so as not to tire the pupil, and, most important, never sing with the last breath. That is extremely weakening, and never allow any so-called "sobbing" to accompany the diaphragmatic action.

It does not matter if one breathes often when singing as long as the phrasing is not interfered with.

It is therefore imperative to breathe anywhere and at any time so that it is not perceived. In passionate things, one must naturally breathe oftener because the emotions affect the breath and make it shorter. Also in singing forte the breath is a good deal wasted. The exercises are therefore to be done with regard to the breathing as in this:



so that the lungs may get time not only to give out,—but to take in sufficiently deeply for the new phrase.



This is a good exercise to learn the portamento.

The Binding is next in importance after the breathing. Naturally this exercise ought to be done slowly, "dragging" upward with time for the breathing between each figure of two notes. In an exactly opposite way, the trill is "bound" downward and is quite a peculiar study. I taught myself the trill. In the trill, the uppermost note is the principal thing because there is the same difficulty as when one tries to jump up from below. The lowest note of the trill goes of itself when it has been practised in connection with the higher note. The trill must not be sung; it must be done with a *stroke*, must be done in this manner:



i. e., this interval of a whole or a half tone (the half is more difficult than the whole) is the *last* exercise for the trill. The real trill exercise ought to begin with the octave and so forth till one arrives at the half note interval.



The under note should only hang "in the air," so to speak; both notes in the trill must be "led," but the lower one lets go and the upper one holds fast. Finally it becomes one stroke and this stroke must then be repeated. This exercise one can begin with at once, for there is nothing so helpful for coloratur and portamento as this trill exercise when done properly. But it is not easy to describe with pen and ink. Sing an octave and bind upward, only letting the notes "hang together" (*not cease*) when going down,—is as near as I can put it.

These are about the elements of Singing as I understand them.

My husband may possibly himself give you this letter. With my most heartfelt wishes for the success of the new Conservatorium and with every good wish,

Very sincerely yours

Jenny Lind Goldschmidt.

(Translated by V. M. Holmstrom)